



To: Members of the Common Council of the City of La Crosse

From: City of La Crosse Department Heads

Date: January 8, 2026

Re: Requested Feedback for Charter Ordinance Change 24-1287 – City Administrator

On December 18, 2025, the City of La Crosse department heads received an email from City Administrator Working Group member and Councilmember, Larry Slezniow inviting department heads to *“to share their comments and concerns about this position with council members.”* The City department heads would like to thank the former and current members of the City Administrator Working Group for the time and efforts spent listening to staff, community members, and community stakeholders along with the time and energy put into gathering and presenting data that was shared at the December 16, 2025, City Administrator Working Group meeting. The City Administrator Working Group invested a great deal of time in learning what it would mean if the City of La Crosse adopted this charter ordinance and were to add a City Administrator position, which is appreciated. The success of this group has led to fruitful conversations and soliciting the feedback of our community members.

On January 5, 2026, the City department heads met to discuss the charter ordinance regarding the City Administrator. As the group of leaders who have been entrusted with the operations of our City government, we have identified several questions that we believe require resolution before a charter ordinance is adopted. The response below reflects our shared commitment to transparent governance and our responsibility to the effective day-to-day operation of the City.

Collectively, we believe the following questions require clarification regarding a City Administrator governance model in the proposed charter ordinance.

Governance Structure and Authority

- What specific problem in the current City governance structure does the creation of the City Administrator position aim to address?
 - Are there other ways to address the identified problem that are more cost effective?
- What will the reporting structure be among the Mayor, Common Council, City Administrator, and departments heads?
- What powers will the City Administrator hold individually?
- What powers will remain with the Mayor and Common Council collectively?
- How will decision-making authorities be delineated in areas where responsibilities may overlap?

Selection and Transition

- Who will be responsible for selecting applicants for the City Administrator position for both interviews and selection of a finalist?

- How will the transition be managed given that it will occur mid-election cycle?
 - Will the position of Mayor for the next election cycle be changed from full-time to part-time?
- If approved, the City would need to appoint an interim City Administrator as duties will be removed from the Mayor's office. The Mayor is prohibited from serving as interim City Administrator.
 - How will continuity of operations be maintained during a transition period?
 - How will an interim City Administrator be selected?

Fiscal Impact

- How will the budget support this role given the City's current structural deficit?
 - *The estimated cost to add a City Administrator is approximately \$275,000 - \$285,000 for salary, benefits and non-personnel expenses for the position. This does not include any expenses related to support staff, office space or other negotiated expenses. We likely won't see this full expense realized until early 2027.*
 - *In 2026 we could see approximately \$30,000 - \$50,000 in expenses related to an executive recruitment firm, if the Common Council agrees to use such a service. Currently, this expense is not budgeted.*
 - *In addition, there will be an increased salary expense if an internal candidate is selected as interim City Administrator. This could be upwards of \$50,000 in 2026. Currently, this expense is not budgeted.*
- What will be the budgetary impact on existing department resources to fund this position?
- Is the physical space available sufficient for the creation of this position?
- What data has been collected and assessed to demonstrate a positive fiscal impact for City operations overall with the addition of a City Administrator?

Additionally, the Common Council approved a workforce study in 2026 that will evaluate the operational efficiencies of our current governmental structure and staffing. Through this study, it may identify if a City Administrator is recommended or if other positions could assist with filling gaps that may be identified through the study.

Department heads are faced with the realities of budgetary constraints that have led to reduction in resources, unanswered questions how the change in governmental structure will impact our ability to provide services to the City of La Crosse residents, and a charter ordinance that doesn't answer the primary question of "*what is the problem we are looking to solve?*"

The questions posed by department heads are not in opposition of a City Administrator position, rather they intend to ensure that any governance restructuring is implemented thoughtfully, and with full consideration of operational realities. As a group of experienced public service leaders who have collectively served the City for decades, we are faced with questions that lead to concerns, making it difficult to support a charter ordinance at this time that adds the position of City Administrator.



City of La Crosse

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We believe that the questions listed should be evaluated and answered before a new charter ordinance be introduced. We look forward to continued collaboration and open dialogue.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

City of La Crosse Department Heads

Chadwick Hawkins, Director of Finance

Nikki Elsen, City Clerk

Matthew Gallager, Director of Engineering & Public Works

Jeffrey Schott, Fire Chief

Rebecca Franzen, Director of Human Resources

Stephen Matty, City Attorney

Jacky Greschner, Director of Information Technology

Dawn Wacek, Library Director

Jay Odegaard, Director of Parks and Recreation

Shawn Kudron, Police Chief

Lauren Koss, Interim Director of La Crosse Regional Airport

Adam Lorentz, Director of Transit

Andrea Trane, Director of Planning & Development

CC: Shaundel Washington-Spivey, Mayor